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ABSTRACT

To encourage teachers to use the language-experience approach (LEA) in teaching reading-language skills, a workshop was conducted in which teachers participated in a language-experience lesson. Participants were asked to discuss a controversial topic of current interest; during group discussion, ideas and vocabulary were evoked from the group. Participants then wrote position statements on the topic, using their own ideas, as well as ideas and vocabulary gleaned from the discussion. Participants illustrated their statements, considered vocabulary words they had used as a result of the discussion, read and commented on certain aspects of each other's papers, and placed their papers in a class book. The leader discussed the demonstration and related it to the theory of LEA, stressing that teachers use students' own language and experiences, add new vocabulary and ideas through group discussion and teacher input, get these ideas and vocabulary incorporated in written form, have students illustrate their work, conduct follow-up activities, and place student writing in a class book. (GW)

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Making the Theory of Language-Experience Approach Practical in a Workshop Format

Question: *How do you get adults to apply the theory of the Language-Experience Approach?*

Answer: *Have them actually participate in a Language-Experience lesson, in addition to providing them with practical ideas for its use in the teaching of reading-language skills.*

Most people who attend an LEA workshop these days have heard of the approach and many have tried it. Some come enthusiastically seeking new ideas to keep LEA exciting for their students but many come because they have some problems or questions concerning the approach itself, organization for its use, or difficulties in keeping it alive and stimulating. For this reason, I begin the session by asking everyone to jot down some problems or questions they have about LEA. I ask them to check these off as I address myself to them. At the conclusion of the workshop, I ask them to present any concerns that haven't been mentioned and to share ideas and solutions they have tried successfully.

The session begins with an expansion on the familiar theory of LEA that it is a technique which helps students learn to read in essentially the same natural manner in which they learn to speak. LEA also produces total communicators who are active participants in the listening-speaking-writing-reading process. I talk about various ways of using LEA in the classroom as

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a total language arts program or as a supplemental way of teaching and reviewing reading-language skills. I discuss its use in remedial reading and in work with beginning readers of any age from preschool to adult. Before launching into the first major phase of the workshop, I share my personal feelings about LEA and the satisfaction I have derived from using it and seeing results in the form of enthusiasm, progress, and therapeutic effects with students.

In the participation section of the program, I present a topic of current interest on which people have distinctly differing opinions. For example, a recent topic was "Debate the Great Debates". Two main ideas were presented for people to choose: (1) The televised presidential debates were helpful to me in making my choice. (2) The televised presidential debates were <u>not</u> helpful to me in making my choice. Each participant was asked to pick one point of view with which they agreed. They were asked to arrange a sheet of paper in the following manner:

Title or Main Idea:
Ideas:
Vocabulary:
Position:
(4 sentences)
Political Cartoon:

Then the group was asked to share ideas on the two topics and each person was encouraged to take note of good ideas to incorporate in their position statement. Also, interesting vocabulary was evoked from the group

by the question, "What words come to your mind when you think of the main idea . . .?" I added pertinent vocabulary to their list, such as, "insipid", "rehashing", "articulate", "evasive", "propoganda". They listed interesting vocabulary on their papers to include in their own statements.

The next step in this process was to ask each participant to write a four sentence position statement carrying out the main idea of their choice. They were encouraged to make their statement have a good beginning, middle, and ending. They were also told to include stimulating ideas and vocabulary they had gleaned from the discussion as well as their own original thoughts and words.

After the participants finished writing their statements, I asked them to reread what they had written and devise a cartoon (stick-figures would do nicely) which illustrated an important point in their argument. I asked them to write a caption beneath their cartoon.

Following this stage of LEA, I went into some follow-up techniques. I asked each person to underline vocabulary words they had used as a result of the previous discussion. I asked them also, to circle their "favorite" word - one that really had an interesting sound or meaning for them. Then I asked some of the following questions:

"How many of your underlined or circled words are nouns? Let's list some on the board."

"How many are adjectives, verbs, etc. Let's list them."

I put these words into categories. Then asked them to use a noun, verb, and an adjective to generate a new sentence.

A second follow-up activity was on Fact and Opinion. I read some statements concerning the topic of the debates and asked them to decide if these were facts or opinions. Then I had them exchange papers and circle the facts in another person's paper and underline the opinions. If people had their paper returned and discovered that they had mostly opinions in their statement, I asked them to choose an opinion and write two facts they could use to back up their opinion.

At the conclusion of this process, I told them I wanted to collect all the papers of people who had written on the first main idea and all those who had written on the second. I had pieces of construction paper which had the two titles representing the two main ideas: "The 'Great' Debates - Debatable" and "The Great Debates - a Great Idea". I put these covers with the appropriate papers and stapled them on the sides to make "books". I placed them on the table in back of the room and told everyone that they should look through the booklet of their choice on the way out to see who would be some likely, affable people with whom to have coffee/tea after the workshop.

Then this whole demonstration was discussed and related to the theory of LEA. The following main points were stressed:

1. *Use the students' own language and experiences.*
2. *Add new vocabulary and ideas through group discussion and teacher-input.*
3. *Get these ideas and vocabulary incorporated in a written form, focusing on a main idea and stressing a beginning, middle and end to the writing.*

4. *Have students read and then illustrate, encouraging them to show important details of the writing in this illustration.*
5. *Then, use what has been written by the students, either the vocabulary or the ideas, for appropriate follow-up activities.*
6. *And last, but not least, let the students share their writing in book form.*

To conclude this phase of the workshop I briefly discuss how this whole process of story dictation is just one phase of LEA, that of getting the speech into print. I ask participants to tell the difference between this LEA process and a creative writing activity. Also, I mention practical aspects of story dictation for students of various levels from non-reader to remedial reader, to adult functional illiterate, as well as hints on how to make story-dictation work for groups and individuals. A bibliography of good resources for LEA ideas and theory is then distributed.

The second phase of the workshop consists of "walking" the participants through a display of handouts and numerous charts and books produced by students of all ages, showing the various ways LEA can be utilized in teaching reading-language skills. The general categories that are represented and discussed in this display are:

Word Bank Ideas
Writing Stimulators
Book - Making Ideas
Record - Keeping with LEA

Teaching Comprehension with LEA

Teaching Word Attack with LEA

Teaching General Vocabulary and Sight Vocabulary with LEA

Teaching Grammar and Punctuation with LEA

Interesting Students in Literature with LEA

Miscellaneous

By the time participants have gone through this entire process of experiencing the abstract theory of LEA and seeing and discussing actual student productions, they are eager to try out many of the ideas and they have a clearer understanding of LEA as a total communication-thinking process.